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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 AMMAN 003947

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SUBJECT: JORDAN: ENGAGING ISLAM

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AND (D).

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

1. (C) Embassy Amman's chief goals include promoting moderation and reform within Jordan through contact work and a wide range of programs. Our Economic Reform efforts seek to achieve these goals through improved living standards, increased employment opportunities, and encouraging Jordan's continued commitment to economic reform and liberalization. Political Reform efforts aim at consolidating past democratic changes and advocating greater liberalization in Jordan, consistent with U.S. interests. Education Reform efforts are geared towards skills enhancement and inculcating civic education and democratic values. The Embassy's efforts in the area of Civil Society seek to achieve a number of key objectives including greater transparency and respect for human rights. Finally, Embassy programs aim at promoting Religious Moderation and Tolerance as ends in themselves.

2. (C) Despite the extent and effectiveness of our efforts at promoting moderation and reform, we are not the only force at work in Jordan. Islamists have their own highly-developed programs for assisting people and, ultimately, consolidating political power through them. The Muslim Brotherhood provides charitable assistance directly in the form of food, money, and tuition grants. It also has influence in government-run institutions such as hospitals, schools, universities, and religious enterprises. Because of these programs, the Muslim Brotherhood claims (without further justification) it offers assistance in more cities and towns throughout Jordan -- and therefore by implication has more supporters -- than the GOJ itself. Jordan contains many poor, unemployed, disillusioned, and otherwise disenfranchised persons who turn to movements or causes like the Muslim Brotherhood that may appear to offer them redress.

3. (C) In point of fact, there has been a significant Islamist presence among Jordan's predominantly moderate population since at least 1945. Islamists in Jordan (mainly and most importantly the Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Islamic Action Front) are well-organized and often highly-educated, with a significant history of participation in Jordanian public life. Support for Islamic activism is heaviest in but not exclusive to metropolitan Amman. In past elections, Islamists have won as many as 27.5% of the parliamentary seats in districts spanning much of the length of Jordan from Irbid in the north to Tafileh in the south. There is a strong perception that Islamist influence has grown since the start of the Al-Aqsa Intifada and in the wake of the U.S.-led war on terrorism. Extreme Islamist rhetoric can be strongly anti-American.

4. (C) Embassy programs have helped dampen anti-American sentiment in some quarters. But, given Jordan's place in the center of a tense, combustible, and economically troubled region, extreme Islamist rhetoric resonates more strongly than it otherwise would and can breed sympathy for terrorism even in Jordan. Jordan's situation therefore calls for careful evaluation of our past efforts at promoting moderation and reform as well as for careful consideration of the path ahead. The following paragraphs address both of these topics in detail.

Economic Reform

5. (C) Jordan has made significant strides towards improving its investment climate, and its privatization program is widely viewed as the best in the Middle East and one of the best among developing countries world-wide. Jordan has far outpaced the region in recent years by enacting economic reforms that allowed it to accede to the WTO in 2000 in record time, and become fully TRIPS-consistent in the process. Jordan also entered into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States in 2001.

6. (C) Jordan's macroeconomic fundamentals are sound, and the Kingdom is set to enjoy a third straight year of 4%-plus GDP growth. But there remains a large gap between performance

and expectations, which have been inflated by highly publicized reform efforts that have had little tangible effect at the microeconomic level. GDP growth has not noticeably improved incomes or job opportunities, in large part because population growth rates are high (over 2.8%). As a result, wages are stagnant and unemployment remains high (15% by GOJ/IMF estimates). Bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption/"wasta" also hamper growth. Moreover, regional factors (i.e., sanctions against Iraq and ongoing violence in Israel and the West Bank) mar Jordan's economic landscape by adversely impacting tourism, trade, and foreign investment. Ultimately, resolution of the "expectations gap" requires economic growth that significantly outpaces population growth, resulting in higher living standards and increased employment opportunities.

17. (C) Current efforts: Much of Jordan's progress has resulted, and continues to result, from our multi-faceted assistance programs. USAID programs in particular foster policy and regulatory reform, job creation, trade-capacity building for small Jordanian companies, and access to microfinance for low-income sectors of the economy. USAID is also working with the GOJ to decrease the population growth rate, as a means of reigning in this significant drag on per capita GDP growth. Many of USAID's economic programs are centered on supporting two tracks, the U.S.-Jordan FTA and King Abdullah's recently announced Social and Economic Transformation Plan (SETP). The FTA has become a major centerpiece of our efforts to boost job creation. Although the FTA is only 7 months old, a dozen or so local companies have already benefited by at least \$7 million and additional projects are in the pipeline. The SETP seeks to broaden the impact of positive economic change so that it is felt throughout all segments of Jordanian society.

18. (C) Another USG initiative, the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) initiative, is perhaps our most impressive success story. Designed to enhance Jordanian-Israeli commercial contacts, the QIZs are beginning to transform Jordan's economy and social structure. The QIZs have generated over 22,000 jobs since 1998 and over \$210 million in exports during 2001 alone. Over 70% of QIZ jobs go to women, many of whom have never worked outside the home. And the jobs, along with the multiplier effects of their wages on local economies, are creating pockets of support for political moderation in traditionally conservative communities.

19. (C) Looking Ahead: Given the potentially destabilizing impact of poverty in general and the "expectations gap" in particular, King Abdullah recently announced the SETP. The SETP seeks to spread benefits of growth expected from ongoing economic policy reforms to lower-income Jordanians. Our current and future economic assistance programs will support the SETP. Apart from its direct developmental benefits, the SETP seeks to bolster political stability by ensuring that all Jordanians have a stake in Jordan's future. Stability in Jordan will, in turn, promote regional stability. USAID projects will continue to play a major role in addressing many of the areas related to poverty alleviation, health, water, and economic opportunity.

10. (C) The GOJ has risked a lot by undertaking comprehensive economic reforms, both in terms of its relationships with its neighbors (notably Iraq and Syria), and internally by exposing Jordan's economy to global competition. We, in turn, have a great deal at stake in Jordan's economic success -- not just in aid dollars, but in the political dividends that will accrue if Jordan emerges as a positive exemplar of liberalization's effects on a developing country. Creating such a positive example not only advances our MEPP goals, but also furthers our counter-terrorism goals by using prosperity-derived economic development to discourage new recruits to terrorist organizations. We must make all reasonable efforts to ensure that Jordan succeeds, so that the GOJ remains solidly behind reform and other governments in the region see that the U.S. supports strong internal commitment to reform. This means, inter alia, supporting Jordan's debt reform efforts, helping Jordan accede to the WTO's Government Procurement Agreement, maintaining robust ESF and FMF levels, and assisting the GOJ in making the SETP succeed.

Political Reform

11. (C) The Jordanian Political System: Jordan's Constitution describes the country's system of government as "parliamentary with a hereditary monarchy." Although directly elected legislative assemblies have served sporadically in Jordan since the 1920s, the period since 1989 has marked a new era in Jordan's political history, with increased openness towards opposition groups, restoration of electoral and parliamentary processes previously suspended, and recognition of political parties. The GOJ allowed

Islamists to participate in the 1989 parliamentary elections, where they won 27.5% of the seats. Islamists won only 20% of the seats in the 1993 elections, and then boycotted the 1997 elections. Parliament was dissolved in June 2001 and has not been reconstituted. Nor have new elections been announced. Several long-time Embassy contacts predict Islamists would win around 22% of the seats if elections were held today, and more than that if the regional situation deteriorates further.

¶12. (C) Current Programs: Since Parliament is not now in session, the Embassy does not currently attend parliamentary meetings. However, Embassy Officers attended Parliament frequently in the past and continue to meet regularly with parliamentarians and other persons representing all facets and levels of Jordanian political life. Recent months have seen the restoration of contacts between the Embassy and moderate leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood opposition and its political arm in Jordan, the Islamic Action Front. The Islamist political leadership has committed to continued dialogue with the Embassy and to additional meetings.

¶13. (C) The GOJ has generally supported the Embassy's advocacy on behalf of U.S. interests. We have no better regional partner on counter-terrorism than Jordan. Our deep military-to-military relationship facilitates cooperation in military operations, from Afghanistan to a number of United Nations peacekeeping deployments. Recently, the GOJ went on record hailing President Bush's June 24 speech on the Middle East as marking "the beginning of the end of the conflict between Arabs and Israelis," despite very widespread criticism of the speech within Jordan and throughout the region.

¶14. (C) Looking Ahead: We are actively encouraging the GOJ to hold free, fair, and open elections leading to the restoration of a functioning Parliament, at the earliest reasonable opportunity. In addition, our 2004 Mission Performance Plan proposes a number of other measures aimed at consolidating past democratic changes and promoting greater liberalization in Jordan (see below).

Education Reform

¶15. (C) The Jordanian Educational System: Jordan enjoys relatively high educational status in terms of access to education and education levels, compared to other Arab Countries. It has the second highest adult literacy rate in the region, at over 86%. On the other hand, illiteracy among women (20.6%) is more than twice the rate for men (9.9%) and illiteracy is especially high (27-28%) in some tribal and rural areas like Ma'an and Mafraq. Education is compulsory through the tenth grade. As of 1997, there were seven public and thirteen private universities. Due to the overall strength of Jordan's educational system, broad-based education reform programs are not called for. However, the present Minister of Education is U.S.-educated, and wants to modernize and upgrade a number of elements in the curriculum. Moreover, there is a need to address pockets of illiteracy affecting certain geographic areas and gender/ethnic groupings.

¶16. (C) Current Programs: The Embassy is working closely with Ministry of Education officials in the areas of English-language instruction and civic education. Around thirty Peace Corps volunteers are working (primarily in rural areas) to improve English skills among local teaching staff and students, upgrade teaching resources and materials, and develop innovative and effective pedagogical methods that complement Jordan's national curriculum. The Embassy is also involved in a second program specifically aimed at improving English-language instruction in the middle schools. (The British Embassy's elementary-school English-language program complements this program.) Our middle-school program includes the teaching of English at model schools using English-language textbooks. Finally, teacher training is complete for a third program involving civic education and democracy, using textbooks that adapt U.S. models to the Jordanian context. The civic education/democracy program is scheduled to enter classrooms in twenty schools this September. While high-level Ministry of Education officials strongly support these programs, lower-level Islamist employees criticize what they label "propagandization" through the use of U.S. textbooks.

¶17. (C) In the area of higher education, the Embassy is involved with U.S.-Jordanian academic exchange programs, support of Jordanian post-graduate and post-doctoral students attending U.S. universities through the Fulbright program, and one of only two American Studies programs in the region (at Jordan University). These programs are received enthusiastically by Jordanians, and they carry great weight in promoting a positive understanding of American society, culture, government, and institutions. The Embassy also supports increased use of the English language and quality English teaching at many levels through the Regional English

Language Office, the Arabic Book Translation Program, the American Language Center, the American Center for Oriental Research, and other initiatives. 1700 students, for example, received English-language instruction through the American Language Center in FY2001. During the same year, six books translated through the Arabic Book Translation Program were accepted as textbooks or as assigned reading in Jordanian universities. The AMIDEAST office in Amman provides counseling and information services to Jordanians who wish to study in the United States.

18. (C) Looking Ahead: Much of our work will lie in continuing or expanding upon the range of successful programs we are currently involved in. At the middle-school level, expansion will involve the maturation of pilot English-language and civic education programs as they enter the mainstream curriculum throughout Jordan. We also anticipate expansion in other areas, including preschool and life-skills education, particularly for women and girls. There is, as noted above, a fear in some quarters that our involvement in reforming middle school curricula is aimed at promoting a "secret" U.S. agenda. While such fears do not presently pose a serious risk of undermining our efforts, this risk should be monitored and assessed periodically.

Civil Society

19. (C) Jordanian Civil Society: NGOs promoting a number of important aims ranging from human rights to health care and economic development operate within Jordan. Some of the many NGOs operating in Jordan include Save the Children (operating a junior-achievement type program), the Cooperative Housing Foundation (micro-enterprise financing), the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (environmental conservation and rural economic growth), the American Center for Oriental Research (restoration and preservation of antiquities), Habitat for Humanity (low-income housing), the Royal Commission on Human Rights (monitoring cases alleging human rights violations), the Jordanian Society for Citizens' Rights (human rights and other issues), the Jordanian Women's Union (women's rights), the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (training of Christian pastors and missionaries), and the International Labor Organization (labor issues).

20. (C) Regional tensions present the GOJ with difficult choices in balancing public order with open expression. Despite Jordan's history as one of the more open systems of civil society in the region, and the existence of a vibrant NGO culture within Jordan, critics charge that the GOJ has retrenched on its recognition of press freedoms and freedom of association since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

21. (C) Current Programs: Our programs promoting civil society target a number of areas, some mediated through NGOs like those listed above and others through direct Embassy involvement. As examples of the former, the Embassy supported creation of the Royal Commission on Human Rights as well as the Arab Society for Civic Education (a regional civil society NGO headquartered in Jordan) -- both of which institutions now operate without direct Embassy oversight. As examples of the latter, the Embassy sponsors speaker programs aimed at encouraging women to vote and participate in local politics, as well as exchange programs designed to expose Jordanians to U.S. institutions and society. The Embassy co-sponsors with NGOs numerous workshops, lectures, and other programs directed at promoting democracy and human rights.

22. (C) Other programs seek to encourage ethics and transparency in bureaucratic processes. We are also engaged in the area of judicial reform, where the Embassy sponsors exchange visitor programs exposing key members of Jordan's judicial establishment to key elements of the U.S. legal system. The Embassy has directed, and continues to direct, resources into a number of programs intended to improve the efficiency of Jordan's legal system, including English language instruction for judges, Alternative Dispute Resolution training programs, and case management training. Finally, the Embassy supports, through the USAID Mission, development of private business associations as advocacy groups and spokespersons for private enterprise. These associations promote private sector-led development of Jordan's economy and encourage a new generation of business leaders who understand "new economic" principles.

23. (C) One important lesson deriving from our past experience with promoting civil society in Jordan is that, while it is often possible to gain converts and funding for "new" projects, it is much more difficult to secure long-term support. After an initial "honeymoon" period, some of our best programs either wither for lack of follow-on funding, or are taken over by other embassies and organizations. For example, some of our ideas for elementary educational reform have been adopted by the British Embassy acting under the auspices of the British Council.

124. (C) Looking Ahead: As with programs geared towards educational reform, much of our future work in building civil society will center on the continuation or expansion of the successful programs we are currently involved in, including speaker programs, exchange programs, and programs with NGOs. In addition, the GOJ (with assistance from USAID) is introducing a pilot "village clusters" community development program working with both international and local NGOs to promote grass-roots development based on local involvement and priorities, as part of the SETP. We will assist in the continued rollout of this important program in coming years. We are also working with various governmental and non-governmental organizations to fight honor killings, support implementation of the International Labor Organization's core labor standards, and more generally enhance the already healthy respect for workers' rights in Jordan.

Religious Moderation and Tolerance

125. (C) Religious Moderation and Tolerance in Jordan: About 96% of Jordan's 5.2 million inhabitants are Sunni Muslim. The GOJ estimates the percentage of the population that is Christian at about 4%, although the actual figure is probably lower. There are also small numbers of adherents to Druze, Shi'a, and Baha'a traditions. Jordan's Constitution calls for the safeguarding of "all forms of worship and religious rites" within certain limitations, and states "there shall be no legal discrimination with regard to Jordanians' rights and duties based on . . . religion."

126. (C) As an example of the depth to which principles of religious tolerance permeate, Christian students are not required to attend religious instruction required for Muslims in public schools. As another illustration, the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies and the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research sponsor research, conferences, and discussion on a wide range of religious, social, and historical topics from both Muslim and Christian perspectives. Political Islam finds expression in Jordan's relatively moderate version of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Action Front (the Muslim Brotherhood's Political Party arm), and other more moderate (and less important) Islamist political parties.

127. (C) Current Programs: The Embassy has a number of programs aimed at furthering inter-religious dialogue and tolerance and, more specifically, at engaging Islam. The Embassy has sponsored successful speaker programs aimed at accurately portraying Islam in the United States, some in cooperation with Islamist NGOs such as the Center for Islamic Thought. The Embassy recently brought Georgetown University's Imam Yahya Hendi to Jordan as an exchange visitor. During his highly successful visit, Hendi communicated his view of Muslim experience in the U.S. post-9/11, to counter rumors and anecdotes now circulating in the region about treatment of Muslims in the U.S.

128. (C) Looking Ahead: Our program efforts for visiting Muslim scholars have been very successful, though more efforts along these lines are clearly called for. One important lesson learned through our exchange visitor programs is that, whereas visitors attempting to justify U.S. policy in political terms often fail to get their message across, visitors taking more indirect approaches (e.g., explaining the nature of Islam in America) often encounter more success. Apart from bringing U.S. speakers to Jordan, we should also encourage greater dialogue between Muslim religious leaders in Jordan and their counterparts in the U.S. One way to do this might be to encourage Muslim institutions in the U.S. to sponsor conferences in Jordan or Jordanian visitors to the U.S.

COMMENT

129. (C) Jordan is wedged among Israel, the West Bank, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, at the center of a tense and combustible region of vital interest to the United States. Jordan's geographical and political position in the region present a number of unique challenges, which we must account for in our attempts to promote moderation and reform within the country. Along with the challenges, a number of positive factors make Jordan a relatively fertile ground for our efforts. These positive factors include a reform-minded King, a savvy albeit nascent business elite that is supportive of Jordan's efforts to enter the global economy, and a moderate Islamist movement that professes support for the existing regime and a willingness to engage in dialogue. Within this framework, our efforts and programs hold great potential for continued success.
Gnehm